

Payback

by Cindy Ryan

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Summary: AU of the episode Means to an End. Follows my previous story Boundaries.

1. Chapter 1

This continues my AU verse started in my previous story Boundaries.

Title: Payback

>author: Cindy Ryan
spoilers: Means to an End

>pairings: established Cherri<p>

Merri Brody had known staying in New Orleans would have the good and the bad. Setting down roots always did. You got attached to people, they became part of your life. Part of an extended family. The job they did was dangerous and that heightened the bond. Toss in romance with that and it's an explosion ready to burn her heart. Still Merri had taken the risk. She'd stayed. On top of that she'd let herself become involved with her former partner. Her heart wasn't on her sleeve it was way out in the open perfect target. It had taken a long time for Merri to trust Chris with her heart. Once she had she hadn't regretted it. Not until that phone call and even then she didn't regret a minute of their relationship; not really. Merri just wanted it to move back to the good place it had been.

Days ago the militia had made a daring move against Pride. They'd tried to kidnap his daughter but Laurel had fought back and the would be kidnapper had died in the process. They'd gone into full protective mode around Laurel even though at the time it wasn't their case; they hadn't known it was the militia then. They just knew it was somebody after Pride. Dwayne had brought Chris in to work as a liaison with the NOPD since Chris was now homicide. The current detective assigned to Laurel's case wasn't in too much of a hurry so Pride had been grateful that Chris stepped in.

Fast forward to last night when Chris followed one of the suspects to the garage he owned. Chris discovered a hidden cache of weapons confirming the guy was militia. A gunfight had ensued and before backup could arrive Chris was wounded. He'd taken a bullet to the upper chest. While it had missed any vital organs he'd lost a great deal of blood. Currently Chris's condition was stable. Merri was alone in her vigil next to his hospital bed. Sonya was in a safe house protecting Laurel, Pride was trying to wrap up the case along with Loretta, Sebastian and Plame. Merri leaned forward and took Chris's right hand in hers squeezing it. Logically she knew he was going to be alright. Her heart needed the skin to skin contact. It needed to know he was still there; still breathing; still fighting. That he wasn't going to leave.

"I'm here, Chris. Not going anywhere." Merri said softly. "You rest and get better. If I remember last week you promised me dinner and dancing and I'm holding you to that."

The dinner and dancing in question had been one of the ideas bounced around for their anniversary. While next week wasn't the actual date of their anniversary with real life being what it was it was the closest they could get schedules to meet. Now Merri was just grateful to still have Chris everything else would work itself out. A knock at the door drew Merri's attention and she turned and looked out the glass ICU entrance to see Dwayne Pride. Merri's heart constricted at the sight of her boss. He looked like he'd been punched in the gut several times over. Dark circles under his eyes and deep worry lines on his forehead. She nodded and waved the older man in.

"How's Laurel holding up?" Merri asked after she hugged Pride in greeting.

"Scared but doin' okay." Pride replied quietly as he stood at the foot of LaSalle's bed. "What are they sayin' about Christopher?"

"Should be upgraded to critical but stable later today if his vitals stay the way they are." Merri reported wearily. "They want to do another transfusion once he's stronger."

A long beat of silence passed as Pride leaned his hands against the footboard.

"I'm sorry, Merri." Dwayne stated grimly. "I shouldn't have brought Chris inâ€¦ just with Laurel bein' in danger I wasn't thinkin'."

Merri stood and placed an arm around Pride's shoulders.

"You know he would've asked to help as soon as he heard. This isn't on you, Pride." Merri commented quietly.

"It is." Pride affirmed as he straightened causing Merri to step away. "They wanted to send a message to me so they went after my daughter. Then Christopher got hurtâ€¦ I promise both of youâ€¦ they won't get away with it."

"Prideâ€¦" Merri began taking a step forward but Dwayne shook his head.

"I gotta go." Dwayne said softly before turning and leaving the

ICU.

Merri watched him leave sadly. Dwayne Pride was a good man that shouldn't be carrying such a burden. She could only hope and pray that this was resolved without anybody else getting hurt.

* * *

><p>Sebastian walked through the empty NCIS office. It was after nine p.m but the lab tech hadn't been able to go home. Everyone was on mandatory OT until the current situation was closed. Sebastian was grateful for that not because of the extra money but because he knew he couldn't go home. Too many people he cared about were in danger. This was hitting way too close to home.<p>

Moving into the small kitchen Sebastian leaned against the refrigerator and looked out at the courtyard. Dwayne Pride had done too much good for this city over the last twenty plus years what was happening now wasn't fair. He shouldn't be dealing with this kind of bad karma. The phrase bad things happened in threes kept echoing through Sebastian's thoughts no matter how hard he tried to shake it off. They'd known for awhile that something like this was coming with the price on Pride's head. Nobody had foreseen this.

Struggling to shake off the dark thoughts Sebastian made himself useful and began to make a pot of coffee. He checked the food supplies and made a mental note to make a grocery run. They were all going to need every advantage they could to make it through this mess. They would make it through intact; there was no other option. Sebastian couldn't picture his life without his work family and he wasn't going to. They'd make it through to the other side; they had to. The coffee maker started Sebastian made a quick list of supplies and left.

* * *

><p>Being kidnapped had definitely not been on Merri's to-do list for that day. She was mad at herself for not seeing them before they were on her. It'd been late when she left the hospital and preoccupied. It'd been two days since Pride's visit. Chris had improved but not waken. The doctors were confident that could be anytime now. She'd been lost in thought bouncing between recent events and the past. A screech of tires had been the only warning. An SUV had slammed to a halt behind her. Four men had jumped out all wearing ski masks. Merri had taken out one but the other three had hauled her into the SUV before injecting her with something. Merri had seen the militia tattoos on their arms before she'd passed out.<p>

It was dark where Merri was. She figured it was a storeroom of some kind she could just make out shelves. Merri was sitting on a concrete floor and her arms were bound to a metal post. Merri rested her head against it willing the headache to go away. If she was in another garage that the militia owned then it would be fairly easy to escape once she was free. Merri just need the energy to do so.

As Merri worked on her bonds she couldn't help but think of Chris. She didn't know how long she'd been unconscious but she had a feeling the militia had already alerted Pride that they had her. They enjoyed rubbing salt in his wounds. If Chris awoke while she was gone Pride wouldn't be able to keep something like this from him. Merri could

only pray that her friends could keep Chris in the hospital. If he tried to rescue her he'd be risking his recovery and Merri didn't want that. This mess had to have a happy ending; it just had to.

2. Chapter 2

Title: Payback

>author: Cindy Ryan
notes and summary: see part one

Loretta didn't consider this outcome drawing the short straw. She was simply the person for the job. The person used to telling others bad news. Used to dealing with upset and angry people. That was what Loretta kept telling herself as she waited for Chris LaSalle to regain consciousness. The hospital had alerted Dwayne early that morning around six that the former NCIS agent was showing signs of waking. Pride had his hands full especially now with Merri missing so he had asked if Loretta would sit with Chris.

Loretta understood that Dwayne hadn't wanted Chris to wake up alone. The close knit team had always taken care of their own even if one of them went to work somewhere else. Family was family. It was now nearly eight and Loretta leaned forward as Chris admitted a groan. Loretta hit the call button for the medical staff. A few minutes later Chris was awake. She stepped back and allowed the doctor to assess. The thirteenth blond man with glasses nodded in approval as he looked at Loretta and then Chris.

"Wound is healing nicely and vitals are strong. At this pace Detective you should be home in a few days."The doctor stated.

"Thanks Doc."LaSalle said in a hoarse voice.

"Thank you, Doctor."Loretta acknowledged.

The medical staff left and Loretta sat back down inching her chair closer.

"It's good to see you awake."Wade commented with a smile as she pulled the blankets further up Chris's stomach. "You had a lot of people worried."

"How long was I out?"Chris asked.

"Nearly three days."Loretta replied quietly.

"Merri at work?"Chris inquired.

Loretta straightened and met the younger man's gaze. She watched as a whirlwind of emotions crossed his face.

"She's not at work is she?"Chris prompted his voice thick with worry. "What happened?"

"Merri was abducted last night."Loretta explained grimly.

"Militia?"Chris asked as his face paled. "Of course it was because I

pissed them off."

"Chrisâ€|. "Loretta began.

"They took her because I got close. Damn it." Chris continued as he threw off the sheets and blankets and began to get out of bed.

Loretta stood and stopped him as she reached for the call button and pressed it. She gripped Chris's upper arms to steady him. Even as he sat on the edge of the bed he swayed. She could tell he was light headed and dizzy.

"You know Dwayne has every available officer in the city looking for her." Loretta soothed as the medical staff came in.

"I'm going after her, Loretta." Chirs vowed quietly.

"Not on my watch." Loretta protested as she motioned the nurses over. "I will have them sedate you if I have to."

"Lorettaâ€|. "Chris protested. "That group has proven to be ruthlessâ€|..I can't sit by andâ€|."

"You're in no shape to help her, Chris. Best way you can help is by resting and getting better." Loretta advised.

Chris shook his head as he tried once more to get off the bed and onto his feet. Loretta firmly gripped his right shoulder and stopped him. Chris's gaze locked onto hers and if Loretta had ever questioned the depth of his feelings for Merri she didn't now. Chris tried to mask it but Loretta saw the raw fear. She glanced back at the waiting medical staff.

"It's alright he just got a little agitated." Loretta told the lead nurse.

"If you need us again don't hesitate to hit the button." The nurse replied as they left.

Once the door was shut Chris ran a hand over his face and Loretta let go of his shoulder and stepped back.

"It kills me that I can't be out there lookin' for her." Chris whispered. "She needs me."

"Merri needs you at a hundred percent." Loretta countered quietly. "I promise I'll keep you updated as soon as I hear anything. Right now I need you to rest."

"If those bastards hurt her..." Chris began but trailed off his fists clenched.

"If anybody can handle them it's Merri Brody." Loretta stated as she sat back down. "Get some rest, Chris. It's what your body needs most."

With a frustrated sigh Chris leaned back against the stack of pillows. Ten minutes later he was asleep. Loretta pulled out her cell phone and hit Dwayne's speed dial.

* * *

><p>"Thanks, Loretta. I owe you one."Dwayne Pride said as he ended the phone call.<p>

Dwayne pocketed his phone and slumped back against the right wall of the courtyard of the NCIS building. He glanced up at the gray sky and struggled to get his emotions under control. A storm had moved through an hour before and the air still smelled like rain.

Chris being awake was the only small bit of good news Dwayne had received in the last forty-eight hours. Everything had gradually spiraled from bad to worst. He had thought his baby girl being in danger was the worst of it. Fate had proved him wrong. Chris had gotten shot; nearly bled out now Merri was taken.

The militia wanted him to suffer by targeting the people Dwayne cared about. That was the biggest mistake they were ever going to make and Dwayne vowed to make them pay for it. One way or another the militia was going to end.

End
file.